Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 13 Number 11 November 2016

FIELD OUTING: Wednesday, 23rd November 2016: Hyderabad Golf Club. Meeting point: Punjagutta Cross-roads, 6.00AM.

The vast and beautiful grounds of the Golf Club promise to be an interesting venue for birding. Since a large part of the 18-hole golf course is within the premises of the Golconda Fort, it is likely that we would see a good variety of birds. This will be a half-day trip. Carry snacks and water as usual. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: CONNECTING ONESELF WITH WATER BODIES IN ONE'S VICINITY: Talk by Dr Lubna Sarwat
Wednesday, 16th November 2016, 6.00PM: Hamburg Hall, Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Dr. Lubna Sarwat, Co-Convenor, SOUL (Save Our Urban Lakes) Society, is a prominent social worker and has been actively championing the cause of saving our lakes with the authorities. Our State was well known for its hundreds of lakes, but they are steadily being encroached upon or being polluted by industrial waste. This adversely affects not just us but also the flora and fauna of the region. As Dr. Lubna says, "Lakes are like eyes of the Earth - Let us preserve them as we do our eyelids." Dr Sarwat will share her insights on the issue and how to address it.

Trip Report – Ananthagiri Hills, Sep 2016

Text: Dr Jayati Mitra; Photos: Srikanth Bhamidipati

Golden Orb-web Spider

When our birding trip to the Ananthagiri Hills was announced, it was almost the end of September. The retreating monsoon, overactive with its torrential rains, had left many city streets inundated. The drab grey dawn kept many people indoors but for a few of us this seemed to be the best opportunity to observe nature. As we drove along, the trees along our path, with their dense canopy of lush green leaves, looked strikingly beautiful against the backdrop of an overcast sky interspersed with blue-grey clouds. A light drizzle continued, restricting our *en route* sightings to a few Spotted Doves (*Stigmatopelia chinensis*) and White-throated Kingfishers (*Halcyon smyrnensis*).

A piping hot breakfast with tea energized us, but it was disappointing not to find birds near the Hanuman temple owing to the non-stop drizzle, and the dense undergrowth which blocked our way on familiar trails leading into the forest.

The weather, however, gradually improved by the time we reached the Padmanava temple gate. This is not the season to expect migrants but the tiny Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*) was sighted immediately. More birds were seen as we proceeded down towards the banyan tree. An Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyceros birostris*) flew across our path. The partially-hidden Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala)* was feeding on the topmost branch of a tree. Tawny-bellied Babblers (*Dumetia hyperythra*) hopped around on the bushes and, when two of them flew up and perched on the overhead cable, we could observe their bright orange-brown underbellies.

After panning for a while, the colourful Lesser Goldenback (*Dinopium benghalense*) was spotted holding on to the main trunk and circling it while pecking for insects. Myriad calls pervaded the atmosphere but one whistle seemed to be a clear and distinct sound like *peew-peew-piu*. T he approaching birds were a pair of Jacobin Cuckoos (*Clamator jacobinus*), said to be the harbinger of the monsoon season. The slim black-and-white birds with crests and long tails were looking very graceful in flight. They sat for a while in the tree and moved about quietly on the branches. The restless Great Tit (*Parus major*) was preening all the time and it soon disappeared into the dense foliage. Nothing could distract the Bay-backed Shrike (*Lanius vittatus*) from its would-be prey.

Great Tit

Small winding streams resulting from the abundant rainfall flowed downwards, some merging to form small rivulets along our muddy path. The sight of the age-old trees, some of them parasitic, growing together, with their gnarled branches spreading far in many shapes and sizes, always leaves one awestruck; numerous species of birds are being sheltered and protected on these branches. We observed the White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caerulescens*) and Plain Prinia (*Prinia inornata*) among them. Hanging cobwebs of giant spiders were swinging in the breeze. Suddenly a sharp piercing call was heard above. The Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*) was flying, slowly rising higher and higher in the sky.

We climbed onto the small mounds of earth and crossed over into the open space towards the front. Several trees spread their branches, intertwining with the leaves like a huge umbrella. With great effort a Grey-breasted Prinia (*Prinia hodgsonii*) was seen. Still further away, at a fork-like juncture between two shooting branches, a dark object could be noticed. It took quite some time before Anita could convince everyone that it was an Indian Nightjar (*Caprimulgus asiaticus*). The sighting gave a lot of pleasure to all of us, especially the photographers. A few Yellow-billed Babblers (*Turdoides affinis*) were foraging on the ground.

White-throated Fantail

We moved on cautiously over the wet soil and ended up at a deep gorge full of uneven boulders .The swirling waters gushed over the boulders, making it difficult for most of us to go across. However, a few of the more adventurous birders managed to cross over to the other side. We were walking along slowly when, suddenly, a group of Jungle Babblers (*Turdoides striata*) started calling and hurriedly flew into hiding. We sensed the presence of some predator and, sure enough, there was a Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) which glided down and perched on the top of a nearby tree. All of a sudden there was silence; a typical sign of imminent danger in the wild.

Large-billed Crow

As we moved along, we also saw the Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*), Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus kundoo*) and the Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*). The latter was confusing us with different calls, some of which were mimicking other birds. It was enjoyable to hear the sweet music till we caught the culprit red-handed!

By this time the sun had come up and quite a few tiny birds were moving around. One of them was a Greenish Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*). It took quite some time and great patience before Srikanth could photograph its greenish yellow underbelly to confirm its identity in the presence of other similar-looking birds. Rose-ringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) in flight made the atmosphere cheerful with their calls and bright green plumage.

Rose-ringed Parakeet

Indian Silverbill

Near the gate a mixed flock of Brahminy Starlings (*Sturnia pagodarum*), Asian Pied Starlings (*Gracupica contra*) and Common Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*) were calling excitedly. Red-rumped Swallows (*Cecropis daurica*) were circling overhead, trying to feed on the swarms of insects in the air.

We then gathered together and, as always, checked the final list of birds sighted and shared our experiences with each other. The number of species seen was less than expected, but it was definitely worthwhile to visit the beautiful hills and bird in the rain.

Pied Bushchat (female)

The list of birds sighted during the trip is given below:

Sl #	Species name	Sl #	Species name
1	Indian Peafowl *(Pavo cristatus)*	23	White-browed Wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*)
2	Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*)	24	Scaly-breasted Munia (*Lanchura punctulata*)
3	Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*)	25	Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*)
4	Shikra (*Accipiter badius*)	26	White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caerulescens)*
5	Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*)	27	Rufous Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*)
6	Spotted Dove (*Stigmatopelia chinensis*)	28	House Crow (*Corvus splendens*)
7	Laughing Dove (*Stigmatopelia senegalensis*)	29	Large-billed Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*)
8	Jacobin Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*)	30	Wire-tailed Swallow (*Hirundo smithii*)
9	Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*)	31	Red-rumped Swallow (*Cecropis daurica*)
10	Indian Nightjar (*Caprimulgus asiaticus*)	32	Great Tit (*Parus major*)
11	Little Swift (*Apus affinis*)	33	Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*)
12	Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyceros birostris*)	34	Greenish Warbler (*Phylloscopus trachiloides*)
13	Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*)	35	Grey-breasted Prinia (*Prinia hodgsonii*)
14	Lesser Goldenback (*Dinopium benghalense*)	36	Yellow-eyed Babbler (C*hrysomma sinense*)
15	Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*)	37	Tawny-bellied Babbler (*Dumetia hyperythra*)
16	Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*)	38	Jungle Babbler (*Turdoides striata*)
17	Small Minivet (*Pericocrotus cinnamomeus*)	39	Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*)
18	Bay-backed Shrike (*Lanius vittatus*)	40	Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicatus*)
19	Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*)	41	Oriental Magpie Robin (*Copsychus saularis*)
20	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*)	42	Asian Pied Starling (*Gracupica contra*)
21	Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*)	43	Brahminy Starling (*Sturnia pagodarum*)

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A Day Trip To Rollapadu, Oct 2016

Ambika Pradhan

Eurasian Collared Dove (Photo: Srikanth Bhamidipati)

Winter is always a merry time for birders, with so many migrant species arriving at different parts of the country. We just could not afford to miss such an opportunity and hence five of us (Srikanth, Humayun, Umesh, Lawrence uncle and I) decided to visit Rollapadu WLS. Considering the amount of time it would take to reach the sanctuary, we started from Hyderabad at 4:00AM.

Grey Francolin (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Proceeding to Rollapadu after a brief stop at Kurnool to pick up Umesh, and also to recharge ourselves with steaming hot breakfast, we arrived at the sanctuary by 8:00AM; this gave us ample time to explore the place and look for the beautiful resident as well as migratory birds. As soon as we entered the sanctuary, we were welcomed by a lone Blackbuck peeking curiously through the tall, lush green grass. A few moments later we spotted a small flock of Grey Francolin wandering around on the track, undisturbed by our presence. Large Grey Babbler, Laughing Dove and Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark were some of the other common species we spotted there.

Large Grey Babbler
(Photo: Srikanth Bhamidipati)

But there was one bird that kept us on our toes – the Lesser Florican! We were optimistic that the male Florican would jump out in its mating display at any moment. But having no luck with it, just as we decided to go back to the town for lunch, we spotted a raptor swooping down into the grassland, scanning the area for prey. Although it initially looked like a Short-toed Snake Eagle, we later realized from the photos that it was a Montagu's Harrier (female).

As the Harrier disappeared in the grasslands, we spotted a Shikra perched on a tree, not more than 5 feet away from us. It was an amazing sight, and we clicked its photos to our hearts' content before heading back for lunch.

Shikra (Photo: Umesh Mani)

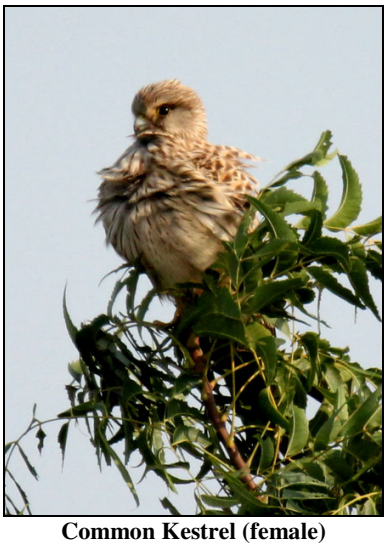
Black-headed Cuckooshrike
(Photo: Srikanth Bhamidipati)

Once we were done with lunch, we drove to Alakanur reservoir to see some waterfowl. But the heavy rains that had lashed the region over the last couple of months had flooded the waterbody, which was overflowing and was blocking our access. We returned to the Forest Department Guest House, where bird activity was at full swing, with Rose-ringed Parakeets chattering continuously, a Black Drongo restlessly chasing a Spotted Owlet around, and a Blue-capped Rock Thrush silently moving from tree to tree, undisturbed by the constant chattering around it.

Rose-ringed Parakeet (Photo: Srikanth Bhamidipati)

Blue-capped Rock Thrush (female) (Photo: Umesh Mani)

We went back to the sanctuary, still optimistic of spotting a Lesser Florican. Later in the evening, moments after we decided to start back for Hyderabad, a Hen Harrier (female) hovered in front of us and gave good views. As we headed back to Hyderabad, I prayed that at least the next time I visited this place, I should get to spot the Lesser Florican and watch its mating display.



Common Kestrel (female)
(Photo: Umesh Mani)

Indian Golden Oriole (female)
(Photo: Umesh Mani)

The complete list of birds spotted at Rollapadu:

Sl #	Species Name	Sl #	Species Name	Sl #	Species Name
1	Grey Francolin	24	Red Collared Dove	47	Jerdon's Bushlark
2	Rock Bush Quail	25	Eurasian Collared Dove	48	Ashy Prinia
3	Asian Openbill	26	Common Hawk Cuckoo	49	Zitting Cisticola
4	Painted Stork	27	Asian Koel	50	Common Tailorbird
5	Indian Pond Heron	28	Southern Coucal	51	Western Crowned Warbler
6	Little Egret	29	Spotted Owlet	52	Yellow-billed Babbler
7	Cattle Egret	30	Asian Palm Swift	53	Large Grey Babbler
8	Intermediate Egret	31	Common Hoopoe	54	Common Myna
9	Little Cormorant	32	White-breasted Kingfisher	55	Blue-capped Rock Thrush
10	Common Kestrel	33	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	56	Pied Bushchat
11	Bramhiny kite	34	Green Bee-eater	57	Common Stonechat
12	Hen Harrier	35	Indian Golden Oriole	58	Indian Robin
13	Montagu's Harrier	36	Common Woodshrike	59	Brown-breasted Flycatcher
14	Black Kite	37	Bay-backed Shrike	60	Purple-rumped Sunbird
15	Shikra	38	Southern Grey Shrike	61	Purple Sunbird
16	White-breasted Waterhen	39	Black-headed Cuckooshrike	62	House Sparrow
17	Red-wattled Lapwing	40	Black Drongo	63	Baya Weaver
18	Black-bellied Tern	41	White-bellied Drongo	64	Indian Silverbill
19	River Tern	42	Common Crow	65	Scaly-breasted Munia
20	Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse	43	Dusky Crag Martin	66	White-browed Wagtail
21	Blue Rock Pigeon	44	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	67	Tawny Pipit
22	Laughing Dove	45	Singing Bushlark	68	Spot-billed Duck
23	Spotted Dove	46	Rufous-tailed Lark		

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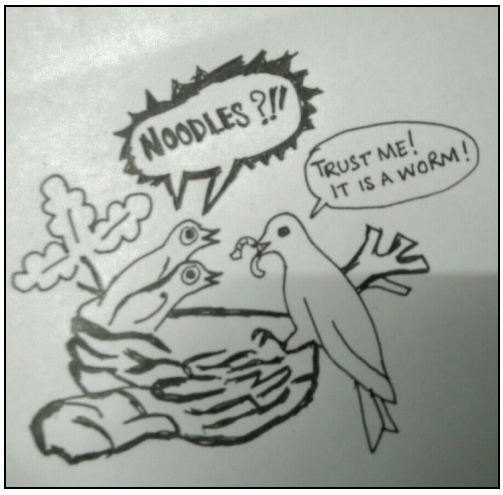
Bird Humour

(Contributed by Bharadwaj Korni)



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Bird of the Month

Text and photo: Umesh Mani

Blue Whistling Thrush (*Myophonus caeruleus*)

Blue Whistling Thrush (Sattal, Uttarakhand, 18-04-2015)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Muscicapidae
Genus: *Myophonus*
Species: *M. caeruleus*
Size: 31-35 cm

Description & distribution: The Blue Whistling Thrush is a resident breeder across its range from Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Pakistan east across the Himalayas in Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan and India, to Arunachal Pradesh, and extending into south-east Asia, including Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. The widely-dispersed populations show significant differences in size and plumage, and several of the populations are considered as sub-species. The adult Blue Whistling Thrush is dark purple-blue, and it shows glistening silvery-blue spangling on the head and the tips of its body feathers (except for the lores, abdomen and undertail). The forehead, shoulders and fringes of wings and tail are brighter blue. It has a strong yellow bill, and the inner webs of its flight and tail feathers are black. Sexes are similar, but juvenile birds are browner, lack the spangling, and the wings and tail are not as bright blue as the adult.

Habitat & behaviour: The Blue Whistling Thrush is usually seen singly or in pairs, near rivers in heavy forest and well-wooded areas, and quite conspicuous near fast-flowing mountain streams and rivulets; it can, however, often be seen at fair distances from water. It is active well after dusk. It hops about on rocks or grass, and moves about in quick spurts. While foraging, it turns over leaves and small stones to look for its prey. Its diet consists primarily of fruits, snails, crabs, earthworms and insects, but it has been known to prey upon mice and small birds. The alarm call is a shrill *kree*, and it spreads and droops its tail when alarmed. Its usual call, however, is a strident *tzeet-tze-tze-tzeet*, and the song is a very human-like whistle that follows a definite pattern.

Nesting: The Blue Whistling Thrush breeds from April to August, and sings even during the darkness of dawn and dusk, when most other birds are silent. The nest is a cup made of moss, grass and roots, placed on a ledge or inside a hollow near a stream. The usual clutch consists of 3 to 4 eggs, and it is known to sometimes raise a second brood in the same season.

Local name: The Blue Whistling Thrush is known as *'pahari neeli kasturi'* in Punjab, *'kuljel'* or '*kaljit*' in Uttar Pradesh, and *'kastura'* in Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir, where it also goes by the very evocative name of '*hazar dastaan*'.

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